

# Exercise offers cancer survivors significant improvements in quality of life

28 May 2015, by Vicky Agnew



For many cancer survivors, a better quality of life is as close as the nearest pair of sneakers. That's because a growing body of research, including two recent studies led by Yale Cancer Center, show that exercise is a powerful way for survivors to improve quality of life.

The studies were presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Chicago. The first evaluated the effect of the LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program on cancer survivors who participated in twice-weekly, 90 minute exercise sessions for 3 months at local YMCAs. The other study explored whether home-based exercise programs that encouraged brisk walking could improve fatigue and quality of life for ovarian cancer survivors. Both studies showed exercise to be a potent tool for survivors to improve life in many areas.

The LIVESTRONG at the YMCA study was conducted by Dr. Melinda Irwin, associate professor of Epidemiology in Yale School of Public Health and associate director of population sciences at Yale Cancer Center; and Dr. Jennifer Ligibel of Dana Farber Cancer Institute. It

evaluated 186 participants for quality of life, physical activity and fitness. After 12 weeks, participants were shown to experience significant increases in physical activity (71 percent exercising a minimum of 150 minutes/week vs. 26 percent for the [control group](#)); and improvements in both overall quality of life and fitness performance (according to a six-minute walk test). The participants had been diagnosed with stages I-IV of cancer and 50 percent had breast cancer. In addition, at the outset of the program, the majority of the participants had been inactive.

"For many people, quality of life is compromised after a cancer diagnosis. This study showed that exercise can improve patients' lives in a myriad of ways, regardless of how active they were in the past," said Irwin, first author on the study. "In addition to quality of life, physical activity is associated with risk of dying from cancer. The LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program could be a national model to increase exercise in cancer patients across the country."

The WALC study, conducted at Yale and led by Dr. Irwin, is the largest exercise trial of ovarian cancer survivors. It enrolled 144 ovarian cancer survivors who were not physically active and randomized them to an [exercise group](#) or control group. Each group received a weekly call from a counselor to discuss a health topic relevant to [ovarian cancer](#) survivors. For the exercise group, women also received [physical activity](#) counseling from a certified cancer exercise trainer during the calls.

The results showed that a moderate-intensity walking program can improve ovarian [cancer survivors'](#) quality of [life](#), in particular physical functioning, improvement in pain and reduced fatigue. Women were interested in exercising and able to do so at recommended levels even though 55% had stage III or IV disease and 25% experienced a recurrence during the trial.

"Our hope is that this study will encourage survivors of even late-stage cancers to consider exercise as a way of coping with a number of issues that come with a [cancer diagnosis](#)," said Dr. Yang Zhou, first author on the study. "We also hope oncologists will use this study and others like it to refer patients to survivorship programs that incorporate [exercise](#)."

**More information:** "Randomized trial of exercise on quality of life and fatigue in women diagnosed with ovarian cancer: The Women's Activity and Lifestyle Study in Connecticut (WALC)." *J Clin Oncol* 33, 2015.

[abstracts.asco.org/156/AbstView\\_156\\_146487.html](https://abstracts.asco.org/156/AbstView_156_146487.html)

Provided by Yale University

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